

ACT Scores for 2003 High School Graduates

Kentucky's average ACT score rose from 20.0 in 2002 to 20.2 in 2003. The percentage of high school students taking the ACT and the percentage of test-takers taking the ACT's core curriculum also increased slightly in 2003. Despite these statewide gains, there is evidence of an achievement gap in Kentucky.

Results released in August show Kentucky's average ACT composite score rose in 2003. This improved performance follows several years of steady or declining scores. The average ACT score for Kentucky's 2003 high school graduates was 20.2, up from 20.0 in 2002. The gap between Kentucky's average score and the national average narrowed in 2003; the national average composite score remained unchanged at 20.8.

Kentucky's scores improved even as an increased percentage of high school graduates took the ACT. In 2003, 73 percent of Kentucky's graduates took the exam, compared to 72 percent in 2002. The coincidence of improved scores and a rising participation rate is significant because the conventional expectation is for scores to decline as participation broadens to include less-prepared students.

The percentage of Kentucky test-takers who indicated they were taking ACT's core curriculum also increased slightly between 2002 and 2003, from 58 percent to 59 percent. The core curriculum includes four or more years of English, three or more years of mathematics (Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry or higher), and three or more years each of specific social studies and natural science courses. National studies indicate students who complete a rigorous high school curriculum like the ACT core are more successful in college.

While average ACT scores rose for many racial and ethnic groups in Kentucky, there is still an achievement gap. Kentucky's average score rose for African American, Asian, and Caucasian students and dropped for Hispanic students. The national average composite score rose for all racial and ethnic groups between 2002 and 2003. The average score for Kentucky African Americans was 16.8 in 2003, compared to 20.5 for Caucasians and 21.8 for Asians. Students in all racial or ethnic categories who completed the ACT core curriculum earned significantly higher scores than those who did not.

Several of the ACT-related measurements discussed here are part of the Key Indicators of Progress. Because the key indicators are being refined, no 2003 goals were established for these indicators. It is possible, however, to measure the progress made in 2003 against the 2002 goals:

The 2002 goal for indicator 1.3, average ACT scores of high school graduates, was 20.2. Kentucky failed to achieve that goal in 2002, but reached an average score of 20.2 in 2003.

Indicator 1.4 measures the percentage of high school graduates taking the ACT. Kentucky made progress on this indicator (from 72 to 73 percent), but did not reach the 2002 goal of 81 percent.

The percentage of test-takers completing the ACT core coursework (indicator 1.5) continued to rise (from 58 to 59 percent), but fell short of the 2002 goal, 60 percent.

One or more of these measurements will remain a key indicator after revision of the key indicators is completed. New goals will be established for the revised ACT-related key indicators.